GUIDELINES FOR INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT PROPOSED HERBICIDE PROJECTS

Forestry Issues Steering Committee

FISC Project No. 1

B.C. Forest Service
Ministry of Forests and Lands

APRIL 1988

Copies may be obtained from:

Ministry of Forests and Lands
Silviculture Branch
1450 Government Street
Victoria, B.C.
V8W 3E7

93-02181/

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PURPOSE	1
PRINCIPLES	1
INFORMATION GUIDELINES	1
Reaching the Public	1
Responding to the Public	2
Holding an Open House	3
Re-evaluating Your Position	4
Choosing Deferment	4
If Confrontation Results	5
Following Up	5
APPENDIX	6

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to assist region/district staff in informing the local public about proposed forest herbicide projects and in dealing with the specific concerns of groups and individuals.

PRINCIPLES

1. Methods of mass communication are often used to convey important information to a large number of people. While this is certainly a useful approach for general topics such as vegetation management, it is not designed to address the specific concerns of the people most affected by a project. Methods of two-way communication must also be used by forest managers to resolve problems and concerns in face-to-face meetings with those directly affected, such as residents, or with opinion leaders such as elected officials and high-ranking members of business groups, service clubs, and professional associations.
2. Information guidelines regarding proposed herbicide projects should tie in with any public information guidelines dealing with forest management and vegetation management in general. It is much easier to inform people about a proposed herbicide project if on-going information efforts have already provided some background. For ideas on presenting background information, see "Guidelines for a Public Awareness Program," Barry Mountain, Forest Service Internal Report PM-PB-20, October, 1986.
3. The degree of flexibility in the herbicide project proposals should be determined from the outset. Vegetation managers should decide what aspects of the proposal are negotiable and where changes can be made to address the concerns of affected parties.
4. It is best to approach the public as soon as possible about any proposal for treating an area. Public input in some form should be considered as part of the project planning process at every phase.
5. People who are philosophically opposed to the use of pesticides may not be receptive to information on herbicides. You cannot ignore these people but you can concentrate on those who are open-minded. However, all those affected by a herbicide project must have equal access to information and equal opportunity for participation, regardless of their position.
6. Public concerns about herbicide use are serious concerns. Even if they are not considered to be valid by forest managers, staff and herbicide experts, these concerns warrant attention and must be addressed.

INFORMATION GUIDELINES

No guidelines should be applied across the board. Like any others, the guidelines presented in this paper are intended for broad application and may require modification as the local situation dictates. A specific information plan must relate to a specific situation. If you need further assistance at any stage of your information program, contact the Silviculture, Protection (Pest Management), Integrated Resources or Public Affairs Branches. Also, talk to other districts, regions or individuals who have experience with public information programs on herbicide use.

1. Reaching the Public

A. Contact local government officials and people living/working near the area proposed for treatment. Then consider contacting local individuals and groups that would be interested in the proposed herbicide project, for example:

—members of the Chamber of Commerce;
—outdoor recreationists, water users and environmental groups;
—representatives of the forest industry and forest associations; and
—representatives of medical associations.

B. Consider making contact through one or more of these methods:

—door-to-door visits or phone calls if a small group of individuals or groups are involved;
—letters when up to 25 are involved;
—a newspaper, radio or TV ad when more are involved.

C. Communicate simply and briefly. Avoid jargon. Double check facts to ensure accuracy. Offer information, such as:

- What the problem is, i.e.:
  - —the size and location of the threatened area;
  - —how the non-crop species affect the crop species; and
  - —current and potential losses.
- What work has taken place in the area, i.e.:
  - —Forest Service planning and management;
  - —identification of historical uses in the area; and
  - —the work done with other agencies such as the Ministry of Environment and Parks;
- What options have been considered, i.e.:
  - —do nothing; or
  - —use manual,
  - —mechanical,
  - —chemical,
  - —biological or
  - —burning methods, or
  - —a combination of methods.
- Why the herbicide option is being proposed, i.e.:
  - —how and when the herbicide might be applied;
  - —its safety compared to other methods;
  - —its cost-effectiveness compared to other methods;
  - —its efficacy (immediate and long-term) compared to other methods; and
  - —a name and number to call for more information.
- What the planning process is, what stage it is at and how people can contribute to it.

D. Invite people to communicate their questions/concerns and to make suggestions and request more information through forms clipped from newspaper ads, letters and direct contact.

E. Keep track of all public responses and document them. Note the number of responses, the kind of responses (e.g., form letter or personal letter), the type of questions and the exact nature of concerns expressed, for example. Also note any references people offer during discussions.

2. Responding to the Public

A. Be up-to-date and well-informed so you can discuss the proposal comfortably and thoroughly.

B. Anticipate concerns and questions and be prepared to deal with them.

C. If you don't have the answers to all the questions, don't speculate. Offer to find out and get back to the individual.

D. Follow up phone calls/meetings with a letter: "Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you. As I recall, we discussed . . . and decided . . ." This letter reduces the chances of later misinterpretations. If you add, "For further information . . . ," you open the door for more discussion. People may be more likely to turn to you for information.

E. Be prepared to respond to requests for field trips, for speakers at group functions or for personal meetings with the district manager, for example.

F. Invite individuals or groups to the region/district office to use the Information Centre.

G. Following up on commitments made to the public is critical for continued cooperation. All input received should be responded to in writing and must clearly state the rationale where concerns or suggestions cannot be incorporated.

3. Holding an Open House

Where there is considerable interest in a proposed herbicide project, consider planning an open house as well as dealing with those parties that are directly affected by the proposal. The open house provides a good opportunity for two-way communication between members of the public and Forest Service staff. Unlike a public meeting, it offers less opportunity for confrontation, which does little to address the issues or to find resolutions.

A. Choose a neutral location, such as a school or a community hall.

B. Schedule the open house during both afternoon and evening to accommodate people working different shifts. More than one day may have to be scheduled.

C. Invite those who have indicated they want to look further into the herbicide project. Also invite the media, local government officials, the Chamber of Commerce, local opinion leaders, members of the forest industry, forest associations, outdoor recreationists and environmental groups. Consider setting aside special times for some of these groups to attend.

D. Advertise the open house in the local media. Include the following information:

- What is happening;
  - —Describe the event and its components.
  - —Explain the purpose or theme of the open house.
  - —State for whom the event is being held, i.e., for the general public, etc.
- When it is happening;
  - —State both the times and the date of the open house.
- Where it is happening;
  - —State the name and address of the building.
  - —Include a room number or section of the building, if appropriate.
- Who is responsible;
  - —Mention both the district office and the B.C. Forest Service.
  - —Include the ministry logo.

E. Set up displays using the following material. Much of it is available in district or region offices and can be set up quickly and easily:

- Copies of a question-and-answer fact sheet on the herbicide proposed for use;
- Videos: (1) "The Trouble With Weeds" and (2) "The Safe Application of Herbicides";
- A graph comparing the amount of timber lost to weeds and to fires;
- The Forest Pesticide Handbook.
- A selection of brochures and booklets on vegetation management, pesticides and pesticide registration and regulation, such as:
  - —"Pesticides in Forest Management";
  - —"Pesticide Use and Control in Canada," prepared by Agriculture Canada, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Health and Welfare Canada;
  - —"A Matter of Safety," a Canadian Pulp and Paper Association brochure on the testing and registration of pesticides;
  - —PesTopics #15 to illustrate the provincial pesticide controls;
  - —"Vegetation Management in Canadian Forestry" prepared by the Canadian Forestry Service;

  (*Note: Copies of all of the above will be included in the Information Centres.*)
- A detailed map of the area proposed for treatment. Use the largest scale possible so that creeks, etc. are obvious;
- illustrations of the target species;
- copies of a fact sheet on the vegetation management problems of the area, the treatment options that have been considered and details of the proposed herbicide project (e.g., backgrounder on Gold Hill in the "Appendix");

- graphs illustrating the importance of forestry to the local area, relative to other sources of employment and revenue;
- position papers from a variety of organizations on the use of herbicides;
- a notice listing the hours that the Information Centre is available to the public;
- a list of other agencies involved and non-forestry authorities on herbicides, e.g., in the fields of health and environment.

F. Anticipate the questions and concerns that might be raised and discuss them with your staff. Prepare answers thoroughly. Experienced resource people, as well as the district manager, should attend the open house.

G. Mingle with the public during the open house and discuss the herbicide project proposal with individuals. Offer to answer questions. Address specific local issues and concerns one-on-one whenever possible.

H. Encourage people to sign up for:
- A field trip to see the vegetation problem first-hand;
- A demonstration to see how the proposed herbicide would be applied;
- A field trip in an area that was once treated with herbicides.

"The dynamics of discussion improve remarkably when people are in the field, one-on-one or in small groups. The natural enthusiasm and commitment of our staff is communicated best in the field."
— a comment from the Campbell River Forest District.

I. Ask each person to fill out a brief questionnaire. Ask if the respondent understands the need to manage vegetation in the proposed target area and if he/she agrees with the use of herbicides there. Include a space for comments and ask respondents to include their names, addresses and phone numbers if they wish a response.

J. Every resource person should make note of the concerns, comments and suggestions made by individuals during the open house.

K. Follow up individually with those who express concerns or need more information.

4. Re-evaluating Your Position

If your best efforts fail to assuage strong concerns, you may have to reconsider your position.

A. Determine how you might alter your project proposal to address concerns and to gain public acceptance.

B. Deal directly with opposing groups and individuals to attempt to resolve concerns through adaptations to your project and their needs.

C. Consider holding a second open house to present the revised proposal.

D. Keep track of the responses by distributing a second questionnaire.

5. Choosing Deferment

If you cannot change the original proposal, or if a revised proposal is still not acceptable to the public, you might choose to defer the project.

A. Consider the gains deferment may make in terms of public confidence or in terms of time to fill in information gaps.

B. Consider the detrimental effects deferment may have on the local forest and the economy, and on other similar projects.

C. Speak with local leaders and groups to ensure that they understand the impacts of the deferment and the reasons for choosing it.

D. Announce the deferment through the media, stating the reasons and pointing out potential losses.

E. Review the deferment with staff and others to see how the project proposal might have been handled differently.

6. If Confrontation Results

In the face of strong public opposition to the proposed project, ask the regional Pesticide Decision Committee to review the proposal and decide whether or not it should be pursued. If the proposal continues, it will most likely be appealed.

A. Prepare for an appeal hearing.

- Make legal advice and expert witnesses available to district staff.
- Consider providing media relations training for witnesses.
- Brief all personnel attending the hearing and ensure they are up-to-date and well-informed.
- Be prepared to respond to appellants' concerns and arguments.
- Have information hand-outs available on request at the district office.
- Help prepare answers to letters to the Minister's office and all "Letters to the Editor" in local papers to clarify erroneous information.
- Anticipate media interviews and be prepared to respond positively, candidly and calmly.

B. Anticipate further opposition if the appeal fails.

- Prepare to face anti-herbicide demonstrations and angry public responses to the project.
- Consider the value of a temporary cooling off period.
- Consider the possible effects of your response on all ministry activities — not just herbicide applications.
- Contact appropriate branches for advice/assistance.
- Ensure that the regional Pesticide Decision Committee remains informed.

7. Following Up

Whatever your plan of action, continue working to establish good relations with the public.

A. Report any changes in proposed herbicide projects. If there are major departures, arrange for a public review of the adjusted plan.

B. If a project goes through, ensure that it lives up to the expectations raised. Arrange to show interested groups and individuals the results in the field. Future public trust must be earned through performance.

C. Keep the lines of communication open. Hold regular updating sessions on herbicide proposals.

APPENDIX

GOLD HILL
Kootenay Lake Forest District
Nelson Forest Region

BACKGROUNDER

Introduction

It is the Ministry of Forests' responsibility to manage the Crown forest lands in the Province of British Columbia. One aspect of management is to re-establish forests on land that has been logged or burnt by wildfires. In order to re-establish a forest it is sometimes necessary to control the growth of brush which either:

(a) prevents new trees (seedlings) from becoming established; or

(b) kills the young seedlings by robbing them of the water, light, and nutrients they need to survive; or

(c) competes with the young trees and prohibits them from growing satisfactorily.

Background Information

Herbicides are only one tool that foresters use to control brush. Starting even before logging, forest managers attempt to design a way of logging and plan after-logging treatments which will effectively encourage the growth of new forests in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

Considering that approximately 165 000 hectares are logged and another 50 000 hectares burnt by wildfires annually, it is not always possible to avoid brush problems in every area. In instances where brush is a problem and must be dealt with (usually the most productive forest land), foresters prescribe a treatment and also determine the best treatment method. Careful consideration is given to all factors in determining the best method, including effectiveness, cost, effect on water quality, wildlife, the site itself, and the concerns of the local public. The types of treatments that foresters would consider include:

- fire;
- manual methods such as pulling the brush by hand or cutting it down with tools such as saws, chainsaws, axes, sanviks;
- mechanical methods such as mowing the brush down with a crawler tractor;
- biological methods such as putting animals into the area to graze the brush; and
- the use of herbicides.

In cases where it is determined that herbicides are the most feasible option, foresters consider using only herbicides that are registered for use in Canada. A herbicide is only registered for use in forest management after extensive, long-term testing shows that it poses minimal risk to the public or the environment when properly applied. The federal government, specifically Agriculture Canada, sets the standards for the testing, reviews the results, and determines whether or not the herbicide should be registered. Health and Welfare Canada, Fisheries and Oceans, and Environment Canada are also involved in the review process. If the herbicide does not meet a specific set of standards, then it will not be registered and therefore cannot be used in Canada.

As a further safeguard to the public and the environment an application of herbicide to Crown land in British Columbia may only be made if a permit has been issued by the Pesticide Control Branch of the Ministry of Environment and Parks.

In the Kootenay Lake Forest District, as with all districts in the Nelson Forest Region, all proposals for herbicide use are referred to the Water Management and Fish and Wildlife Branches of the Ministry of Environment and Parks, and other agencies for review prior to being sent to the Pesticide Control Branch. This ensures that local issues and concerns are addressed.